

POLST FAQ



What is the POLST ?

POLST (Portable Order for Life Sustaining Treatment) is an out of hospital medical order that helps give individuals who are seriously ill or near end-of-life more control over the life-sustaining care they receive. Produced on distinctive bright green paper and signed by both a clinician and their patient or their representative, POLST specifies the types of medical treatment that an individual wishes to receive in the event of a medical emergency outside of a hospital when they cannot communicate for themselves.

Who would benefit from having a POLST ?

POLST is designed for seriously ill individuals, those in poor health, those living with disease, at any age, wanting to limit the amount of time they live with that disease, like Alzheimer's, or those at a late stage of life that want to avoid the impact of a medical emergency changing their quality of life. For more information, please see "Do I need a POLST?" (or POLST considerations) document.

What are my options for life-sustaining treatment in the POLST?

There are several decisions you can make about which life-sustaining treatments you do, or do not want, based on the risk they present to your future quality of life. The decisions documented on the POLST form include whether to attempt CPR, use a ventilator to help with breathing, admit to ICU level of care, administer antibiotics and IV fluids, provide artificial nutrition, allow hospital transport and more.

Who authorizes the POLST ?

A health care professional completes the form with the patient. This can be done during an annual wellness visit or at any time upon request of patient, surrogate decision maker or a medical provider. Once completed, POLST must be signed by both the patient or their surrogate decision maker and either their physician (MD/DO), a nurse practitioner (ARNP), or a physician assistant-certified (PA-C).

Where do I display my POLST so it's easily accessible in the event of an emergency and medics are called?

Your POLST form should be posted on your refrigerator or freezer door. This is where emergency personnel are trained to look for it. Copies can be made and given to those that care for you and administrative offices at group living communities. If you are travelling or away from your home, carrying a copy of your POLST with you in your handbag, backpack or pocket is a smart choice as paramedics need the actual form to act on it, a photo of the form on your phone is also helpful and can be shown to emergency personnel by a caregiver or loved one.

Does my POLST go with me to the hospital?

Yes. EMS providers will in most cases bring your POLST form along with you to the hospital to inform emergency room teams that you have documented your wishes for life-sustaining treatment. It is always a good idea to be sure your most updated Advance Care Planning (ACP) documents, including POLST, are on file in your local hospital medical record.

How is POLST different from my Advance Directives? Do I need both?

All adults over 18 should have an Advance Directive, regardless of their health status. Not everyone needs a POLST. A person should only have a POLST if they want to limit life-sustaining treatment in the event of a medical emergency outside of the hospital.

Does the POLST form replace traditional Advance Directives?

POLST is not intended to replace an Advance Directive. An Advance Directive is still necessary to appoint a legal health care decision-maker as a Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare, to clarify how long you would want to continue any treatment that has been started and what is the hoped-for outcome.

Can I change my POLST form?

Yes, you can change your POLST at any time. It is a good idea to do this if your preferences for treatment change. It is recommended to review the decisions on your POLST form if there is a change in your overall health or your treatment preferences change for any reason. Remember, if you change your POLST form, make sure that you update all those invested in your care, including scanning an updated copy to your medical record.

Do I need to change my POLST form if my doctor retires or I switch medical providers?

No, you do not need to change your POLST form if the medical professional who signed it is no longer practicing or available. The signature at the time you created the form is valid. If you have a new provider, it is a great idea to review any existing ACP documents, including a POLST so that they know your preferences for care.

What happens if I don't have a POLST form?

Without a POLST form, all life-sustaining treatment will be given. When possible, you will be stabilized and transported to a hospital. Once you are in the hospital, if you are not able to speak for yourself, emergency medical personnel, nurses, and physicians will look to those named in your Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare or next of kin to communicate your wishes for you, or your Healthcare Directive on file (if you have completed one). If none of those resources are available, in most situations, all life-sustaining measures will be taken until otherwise guided by previously completed documents or surrogate decision maker guidance. If next of kin or POA indicated they are DNR and did not have the form, EMS should call online medical control and document.

What happens if my surrogate decision maker refuses to honor my wishes and asks emergency personnel to go against my POLST form?

This can happen. Allowing someone we can about die can be very hard in the moment. This is why it is so important to make sure that all those who care for you know your preferences and are willing to honor them. If your surrogate decision maker or next of kin is adamant about emergency personnel offering full treatment, you may receive full treatment and be transported to the hospital where more in-depth decisions can be discussed. If you have been clear you did not want treatment that has been started, it can be stopped in the hospital setting.

Are copies of my POLST form valid? Must green paper be used?

Copies of your POLST are valid. Bright green paper is used to distinguish the form from other forms in the patient's record; however, the form will be honored on any color paper. Make sure in all cases the signature on the form authorizing it as a medical order able to be easily read and viewed on every copy.

Is POLST required by law?

No. Completing a POLST form is always voluntary.

Can my DPOA for Healthcare complete for form on my behalf with my medical providers?

Yes, A designated surrogate decision maker can create a POLST on your behalf with your care provider. This is often the case when people are living with cognitive impairment and have communicated their wishes to limit treatment once they reach a point where they no longer are able to live independently or their quality of life is diminished.

Is POLST available as a wallet card or bracelet?

At this time, the Washington state POLST is only available in its standard size. While a "pocket" POLST, or bracelets and necklaces could alert a first responder as to a person's wishes and may encourage them to find the POLST form, medics in Washington are not allowed to act on directions found on a pocket card, bracelets/necklaces, or DNR tattoos alone.

What if I travel to another state—will my POLST be valid?

If you are traveling to another state, it is a good idea to take copies of both your Advance Directive and your POLST form with you. Both documents, even if not legally binding, will help emergency rooms, physicians and health care professionals know your wishes.

What if I move to another state—will my POLST be valid?

If you are moving, you should bring your POLST with you to your first appointment with your new physician or health care professional to put your wishes on that state's POLST form (for a list of states with POLST programs, visit the [National POLST Program website](#).) You should also talk to evaluate updating your Advance Directive. Some states require you use a specific form in order for your Directive to be valid.

Is there a state registry to have all POLST forms on file for EMT?

There is not a state registry in Washington state at this time.

Developed by the Washington POLST Steering Committee. May be used/ adapted with permission.

For more information and resources please visit WashingtonPOLST.org or email info@washingtonpolst.org